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ABSTRACT

In August 1993 the Des Moines (Iowa) community created a new type of neighborhood school by placing an elementary school close to where the parents work, rather than where they live. This school, the Downtown School, serves a diverse community of students, emphasizes parental involvement, and implements current research in education. This report reviews its first 2 years of operation. Founding principles for the Downtown School were that it would require parent involvement and communication and that it would have small classes, with an integrated curriculum in multiage classes featuring experience-based active learning. The Downtown School was planned with a year-round calendar, portfolio assessment, and parent-teacher-student conferences three to four times a year. The school opened with 45 students, and serves 96 in its third year. Students from low-income households account for 34% of the enrollment, and students from minority groups make up 27.5% of the student body. A look at the program after 2 years shows that the school has been welcomed by the community and has created effective partnerships with the business community. Its self-evaluation efforts have targeted areas for improvement. Although the Downtown School has been open for only a brief time, student achievement measured by standardized tests has been above national and district averages. (Contains 10 tables, 19 figures, and 42 references.) (SLD)

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The Downtown School

Community Report

Connecting Learning with Life

January 1996

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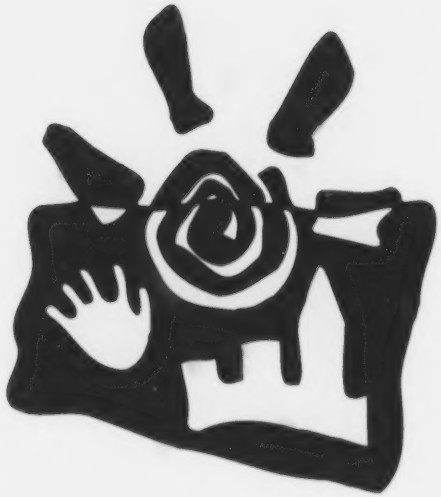

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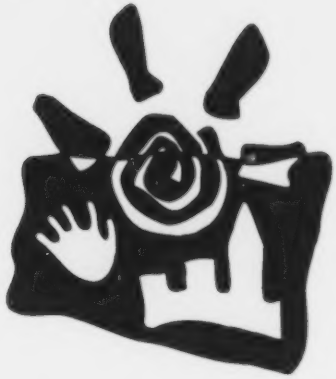

The Downtown School

Community Report

Connecting Learning with Life

January 1996

Research, writing, and report design: Kelly Lacey
Downtown School logo: CMF&Z Public Relations
Writing and editing: Jan Drees

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"Your school is doing what we want every other school in Iowa to be doing."

Edie Eckles, Coordinator of School Improvement
Iowa Department of Education

On August 23, 1993, the Des Moines community created a new type of neighborhood school; a school located close to where parents work rather than where they live. This school, the Downtown School, serves a diverse community of students, emphasizes parental involvement, and implements current research in education. To the community who conceived and established this school, and to those who want to learn more about it, we are pleased to present this report of the school's first two years.

We wish to recognize the many individuals and organizations who contributed to the success of this project, most notably the Business/Education Alliance, under the leadership of Tom Gaard and Hal Thorne, and the Board of Directors and administration of the Des Moines Public Schools, under the leadership of Gary Wegenke. We also want to extend our appreciation to other educators, parents, business representatives, students, community members, and the Iowa State Department of Education who assisted in the creation of the Downtown School.

We are indebted to many, especially to the Downtown School educators, who were willing to meet the challenge of working in a high profile environment. These educators have shown that when sound instructional strategies and proven research are put into practice, success is achieved.

Don Brubaker
Executive Director
Elementary and Early
Childhood Programs
Des Moines Public Schools

Jan Drees
Executive Director
Des Moines Business/
Education Alliance

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Introduction

Imagine a place where children curl up in a rocker or stretch out on the floor to read and discover the world.

Imagine this place where children grow and experience in a nurturing and challenging learning environment...

...a place where talents and abilities are polished and individual personalities shine.

This place is a school. A school where children work together and learn from each other.

A school where parents work just around the corner, and stop in for lunch and to share in the day's activities.

A school that thrives in the heart of downtown Des Moines.

This is the Downtown School -- Connecting Learning with Life!

Introduction

The Downtown School began as a solution to a problem. The problem facing working parents was how to be involved in their child's education, balancing their obligations as employees with the responsibilities of parenthood.

The solution was to locate a school downtown where parents worked, so they could be involved with their children on an everyday, any day basis.

The concept for the Downtown School originated with a task force of Des Moines business and education leaders meeting to discuss ways business could be involved in the development of world class schools and the preparation of students for employment.

In February 1990, the Business/Education Alliance was established as a partnership between the Des Moines Public Schools and the business community. Thirty-two recommendations were made; one was to explore the feasibility of establishing an elementary school in downtown Des Moines.

Introduction

Committees were formed to research the issues.

A market survey was conducted to determine if parents were likely to enroll their children in a downtown school if one were available.

The literature was reviewed yielding information on corporate involvement and the best practices in education.

Focus groups were conducted to determine what parents, teachers, business leaders, and school administrators perceived to be the characteristics of an ideal elementary school.

Site visits were made to schools identified in the literature as having components of interest to the research team.

From this research, a plan for the Downtown School was developed and presented to the Board of Directors of the Des Moines Public Schools. The Board approved the plan in April 1993, establishing the Downtown School on the skywalk in downtown Des Moines.

Introduction

The Business/Education Alliance opened the Downtown School in August 1993 to meet the needs of families working in the downtown area by providing a school close to the workplace and based on research.

The following specific goals were identified:

I. The educational experience provided by the Downtown School will be firmly based on what research has shown to be the best practices for young children.

II. The Downtown School will provide a top-quality academic program to a diverse community of students.

III. The Downtown School will utilize the unique resources afforded by its location.

IV. The Downtown School will collaborate with businesses to create a model school for others to replicate.

V. The Downtown School will continuously conduct self-assessment and improvement activities.

Introduction

This document reports the progress of the Downtown School toward these goals during the first two years of the school's operation.

The sections of this report correspond to each of these goals. Items printed in black reflect the practices of the school. Items in teal show samples of the research implemented, quantifiable data, and comments from educators, parents, and community members.

The information in this report is based on the small number of students served during the first two years of operation. Although there is evidence of success, the small numbers and short period of time should be considered when reviewing the data.

In addition to the Downtown School goals, this report details progress made toward goals outlined in the District Improvement Plan of the Des Moines Public Schools. A burgundy check mark indicates district targets that the Downtown School addresses.

Finally, this report illustrates how the practices of Downtown School reflect the Des Moines Public School District's beliefs. These belief statements are listed on pages 8-9, and the report supports these throughout.

Executive Summary

The concept for the Downtown School originated with a task force of Des Moines business and education leaders meeting to discuss ways business could be involved in the development of world class schools and the preparation of students for employment.

In February 1990, the Business/Education Alliance was established as a partnership between the Des Moines Public Schools and the business community. Thirty-two recommendations were made; one was to explore the feasibility of establishing an elementary school in downtown Des Moines.

Committees were formed to research the issues. A market survey was administered, literature was reviewed, focus groups were conducted, and site visits were made.

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Executive Summary

The Business/Education Alliance opened the Downtown School in August 1993 to meet the needs of families working in the downtown area.

This document reports the progress of the Downtown School toward the goals of the school during the first two years of the school's operation:

I. The educational experience provided by the Downtown School will be firmly based on what research has shown to be the best practices for young children.

- Parental Involvement & Communication - The location and schedule of the Downtown School promotes parental involvement, not only in special events, but in everyday activities of the school. During the first two years, 3,492 parent visits were logged during the school day.

- Small Class Size - Research on small class size has been implemented with only sixteen students per class. Downtown School teachers concur that small class sizes allow them to make learning more individualized and effective.

- Integrated Curriculum - Traditional subjects are integrated and focused on themes. Students learn and practice subject-area skills in authentic problem-solving situations.

- Multiage Classes - Each class includes students whose ages span two or more years. Research indicates that social and academic growth are accelerated as students are able to associate with more developed peers.

- Experience-Based, Active Learning - People learn more when they experience things for themselves and teach others; therefore, Downtown School teachers create an environment that encourages students to learn by doing and then share their learning with the class.

- Extended School Year - Downtown School students benefit from a year-round calendar with a six-week summer break and four week-long breaks throughout the year.

- Three-Way Conferences - Three to four times a year, the teacher, parents, and students review accomplishments and develop goals for the students. Teachers schedule both the time and location of conferences to accommodate the needs of parents. This flexibility, along with rescheduling, has yielded 100% participation.

- Portfolio Assessment - Portfolios of work are maintained to authentically assess progress and share at conferences. Rather than grades, teachers use narrative to describe growth in academic and social activities.

II. The Downtown School will provide a top-quality academic program to a diverse community of students.

- The Students - The Downtown School students reflect the racial, economic, and social diversity of the Des Moines School District. Students from minority groups account for 27.5% of the student population. Students from low-income households account for 34%.

- Enrollment - The school opened with 45 students, expanded to serve 80 its second year, and currently serves 96 in the third year. Still, over 150 students have been turned away and over 250 students are on waiting lists for the next five years. The Downtown School has 10% of its students open enrolling from suburban districts.

- Administration and Staff - The administrators provide facilitative leadership, empowering teachers to make decisions concerning the educational program. The Downtown School staff are among the best in the district. They are experienced teachers with a variety of specialized skills.

- Redefining Basic Skills - The Downtown School's curriculum has redefined basic skills by adapting and integrating the academic and social skills outlined by the United States Department of Labor as being necessary for the workplace.

- Evaluation - The Downtown School students have been assessed with a variety of tests: standardized, criterion-referenced, and performance-based. Although the data shows evidence of success, the small numbers and short period of time should be considered when reviewing the data.
  - At the end of 1994-95, 73% of six-year-old students scored more than one year above grade level on the Reading Recovery Running Record Text Level Assessment.
  - In the 1994-95 school year, over 80% of Downtown School students scored "Competent" or higher standard on District Composition Assessment; the district as a whole had 30.9% of students achieve this level.
  - In the 1994-95 school year, 100% of Downtown School's seven and eight-year-olds achieved the district goal of 70% on the District Objectives-Based Math Problem Solving Test. 70.8% of district second graders and 73.7% of third graders achieved this level.
  - On the GOALS performance-based mathematics assessment at the beginning of the 1994-95 school year, all Downtown School seven-year-olds ranked in the 96th percentile or higher when compared nationally.
  - On the Iowa Test of Basic Skills Pizza Math assessment for the 1994-95 school year, Downtown School students' ranks ranged from the 79th to 97th percentile with an average rank of 94.

III. The Downtown School will utilize the unique resources afforded by its location.

- Resources of the downtown community - The Downtown School staff and students were overwhelmingly welcomed by the downtown neighborhood and have visited over seventy nearby sites, often using the skywalk system.

IV. The Downtown School will collaborate with businesses to create a model school for others to replicate.

- Partnership with Businesses - The business community and school district both contribute resources for the school's operation. The business community provides space, resources for smaller class sizes, and resources for the longer school year. The school district provides teachers, curriculum, and resources for other operating expenses.

- Model School - During the first two years, 2,038 educators, school board members, business people, and community members visited the Downtown School to view educational reform in action.

- Awards, Presentations, and Recognition - The Downtown School has been recognized locally and nationally for its contribution to the education and business communities.

V. The Downtown School will continuously conduct self-assessment and improvement activities.

- School Improvement - The Downtown School has targeted areas for school improvement: implementing international standards for literacy; increasing the use of technology to facilitate teaching and learning; and expanding the school. The Downtown School has identified areas that need additional study, including time and priorities for allocating resources.

The Downtown School looks forward to continuing the current program and expanding the school to serve more students and families in the future.

Mission

Des Moines Public School District Mission

The Des Moines Independent Community School District will provide a quality educational program to a diverse community of students where all are expected to learn.

Des Moines Business/Education Alliance Mission

The Des Moines Business/Education Alliance will create initiatives, mobilize support, and embrace programs that enable every student to aspire to the ranks of world class learner, meet the needs of businesses for well-qualified employees, and prepare students for a productive and satisfying future.

Downtown School Mission

The Downtown School, in collaboration with parents and the business community, will provide a diverse, experience-based learning environment that ensures each child's success.

Our common goal is to enable children to mature into responsible and respectful citizens capable of independent problem solving, teamwork, and leadership. We are committed to a world class educational opportunity for the benefit of all students of the Downtown School, their parents, and community.

District Belief Statements

The Des Moines Public Schools identified beliefs reflecting the values inherent in the district culture that are used to focus the district direction. These belief statements are used as a lens, to determine whether the practices of the Downtown School are aligned with the beliefs of the district.

The beliefs reflected at the Downtown School are printed in color. The page numbers indicate where, in this report, to find supporting information.

DES MOINES PUBLIC SCHOOLS BELIEFS WITH SUPPORTING STATEMENTS

All students can and must learn.

- The schools' curriculum, instruction, and assessment must result in students becoming successful adults. (46-49)
- High expectations are held for all students. (38-40, 46-49, 50-65, 84)
- Students succeed best when learning is personalized. (24-26, 28-29, 30-31, 33-35)
- All students should demonstrate proficiency in a core curriculum. (46-49, 50-65)
- Learning should be measured using a variety of assessment tools and techniques. (33-35, 50-65)
- Schools must provide an organizational structure that allows reteaching whenever necessary. (24, 28-29, 45)

Schools must meet the unique learning needs of each of their students.

- Students learn at different rates and with different styles. (24-26, 27, 28-29, 33-35)
- Staff must recognize the uniqueness of each student and develop strategies and services to meet their needs. (24-26, 28-29, 30-31, 33-35)
- Appropriate learning assessments and interventions must reflect differences in learning styles. (24-26, 28-29, 30-31, 33-35, 50-65)
- Early childhood learning lays the foundation for future success. (46-49)
- Students' learning needs are supported by early interventions at every level. (20, 33-35)
- Gender, ethnic, and socioeconomic status must not be barriers to participation and achievement. (38-40, 50-65)

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District Belief Statements

The home, school, and community must serve and support one another.

- Our community must value education and be a strong advocate for children. (69-71, 74-75)
- The school and community must enable families to send children to school ready to learn successfully. (20-23)
- Students need positive role models at home, at school, and in the community. (20-23, 69-71)
- The entire community is a resource for learning. (30, 69-71, 78)
- Students must experience the arts and culture of the community. (30, 69-71)
- Schools belong to the community. (42, 69-71, 76-78)

Teaching and learning require a healthy, safe, and orderly environment.

- Self-discipline, respect, and responsibility are essential. (30, 46-49)
- Strong administrative and staff leadership are necessary. (43, 44-45)
- Parental and community support are needed. (20-23, 33-35, 69-71, 74-75)
- Students must be taught appropriate ways to manage conflict. (49)
- Students must learn to be responsible for their actions; schools must communicate clear expectations and consequences. (30, 33;35, 46-49)

Resources and services are essential for effective instruction.

- Competing demands for limited resources require strategic planning. (41, 74-75)
- Technology should support teaching and learning. (84)
- Curriculum materials and support services should be provided to meet the needs of a diverse community of students. (27, 30)
- Time is a valuable resource. (26, 32, 85, 86)
- Facilities must complement and promote teaching and learning. (1, 31, 69-71)
- Schools reflect the degree of financial support the community provides. (41, 74-75)
- Decisions regarding the use of resources should be made collaboratively by staff and community. (43, 74-75)
- The design and size of each instruction group should be appropriate for the learning task. (28-29)

All staff must continue to learn, and all schools must continue to improve.

- Staff must have time together to learn and reflect for planning, organizing, and sharing ideas. (26, 85, 86)
- Learning gained from staff development programs should be appropriate, implemented, and assessed. (45)
- School improvement requires a systemic approach. (82-88)
- School improvement requires provision for staff development. (45)
- School-based management through shared decision-making is a vehicle for school improvement. (43)
- Responsible risk-taking supports change and needs to be encouraged. (43)
- Collaborative training programs with other agencies are encouraged. (45, 76-77)

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"This school is actually a response to the needs of parents in the downtown business community. It is not an experiment but rather a structure for implementing tried and true approaches to educating young children."

Gloria Hoffman, former Des Moines
Public School Board Member

I

The educational experience provided by the Downtown School will be firmly based on what research has shown to be the best practices for young children.

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"The Downtown School promotes the things my husband and I feel are important in the education of a child: accessibility to teachers and administration, quality teachers, high expectations, small class size, access to downtown, and multicultural diversity."

Michelle Bliss, parent

Parental Involvement & Communication

Parents are recognized as the child's first and most important teachers and play an integral role in their education.

The Downtown School recognizes the time restraints of working parents and establishes policies and practices to promote parent involvement.

The Downtown School offers parents a variety of opportunities to be involved. Parents share their expertise in school projects; host field trips to their workplaces; participate in parent-teacher-child conferences; visit often; provide professional services for the school; and serve as leaders for the School Based Council, Parent-Teacher Association, and various school committees. Some parents even had roles in the school musical.

The location and schedule of the Downtown School are planned to involve parents, not only in special events, but in everyday activities of the school.

"When parents are involved in their children's education, both children and parents are likely to benefit. Researchers report that parent participation in their children's schooling frequently:

- enhances children's self-esteem
- improves children's academic achievement
- improves parent-child relationships
- helps parents develop positive attitudes towards school and a better understanding of the schooling process."

Brown, P.C. Involving Parents in the Education of Their Children. Urbana, IL: ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education. EDO-PS-89-3.

Parental Involvement & Communication

Parents are welcome at school any time, to volunteer or visit. Parents are encouraged to come as often as possible, and they frequently take their children out to lunch.

"Because of the location we are able to stay involved with school projects, communicate with the teachers and staff about our children's progress on a daily basis, take our children to lunch, go on lunchtime field trips or picnics, and have easy access to the school in case of emergencies, etc. We observe firsthand how this school helps every child learn, fit in, and contribute on a daily basis. Children develop and strengthen their unique talents as well as master the basics. They are enthusiastic about their teachers and their school."
Downtown School parents

Activities such as School Based Council and Parent-Teacher Association meetings as well as student presentations are held during the noon hour, instead of evenings, to accommodate parents' work schedules.

Parents who participate represent the diverse populations of the school. Parents of all races and economic levels, including both mothers and fathers, play an active role.

Parent Visits: 3,492

During the first two years, 3,492 parent visits were logged during the school day. Many parents also chose to visit before and after school when dropping off and picking up their children. The number above reflects visits during the school day; it does not include visits before and after school.

Parental Involvement & Communication

Teachers schedule both the time and location of conferences to accommodate the needs of parents. Conferences have been scheduled at school, the workplace, and homes during mornings, afternoons, and evenings.

Recognizing that working parents have little time available to drive their children to and from activities, child care providers coordinating with the Downtown School are encouraged to offer after-school activities, such as swimming, scouting, open gym, and dance lessons.

Parents of Downtown School students make a commitment to provide transportation to school and come into the building to sign their children in and out. Some use cooperating child care services.

Parents and other relatives communicate with their children during school via phone, fax, or e-mail.

Conference Participation: 100%

The flexibility of time and location has yielded 100% participation. Missed meetings are always rescheduled to ensure a conference is held for every student with one or more parents.

Parental Involvement & Communication

The school regularly surveys parents to learn parent opinion and identify areas for improvement.

The PTA is establishing a school-based resource center where parents will have access to books, tapes, and other materials on education and parenting issues.

The Downtown School has sponsored workshops for parents on topics including DAP (Developmental Activities Program), math, literacy, self-defense, cardiopulmonary resuscitation, and preparing children for their school experience.

"Teachers view parents as partners in the educational process. Teachers have periodic conferences with each child's parents. Parents' visits to school are welcomed at all times."

National Association for the Education of Young Children. Appropriate Education in the Primary Grades: A Position Statement. Washington, DC: NAEYC. 1989: 18.

"In high-quality early childhood programs there is a frequent exchange of information between parent and school about the child, parenting, education, and community services. Parents take an active part in their child's program and make decisions about their child's program and make decisions about their child's learning. Each district and each school needs to have a commitment and action plan for parent involvement."

Cummings, Carolyn. *Appropriate Public School Programs for Young Children.* Urbana, IL: ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education. PS-EDO-4-90.

Small Class Size

Each class is comprised of sixteen students.

"This may be the most attractive feature of our school! I truly believe that small class size is the single, best thing that could be done to improve learning throughout the Des Moines District."
Downtown School parent

Teachers are able to design and implement lessons specifically suited to the needs of individuals more often.

Downtown School teachers concur that a small class size allows them to:

- Frequently assess individual students and use that assessment to guide instruction.
- Better manage an active, hands-on learning environment.
- Keep anecdotal records to monitor learning and adjust instruction.
- Help all students reach their potential in spite of increased numbers of students with emotional, behavioral, and academic needs.
- More effectively provide for children with special needs.
- Communicate with parents more frequently.
- Take more field trips and excursions, extending the classroom into the community.
- Have more time to establish a cooperative relationship with parents.
- Create and maintain a portfolio of student work.
- Conduct more frequent and longer parent-teacher conferences.
- Write an individual educational plan and profile for each student.
- Use a narrative reporting system.

Small Class Size

100% of parents indicated that small class size was important or very important.*

* From a survey of parents administered in the spring of 1995. Responses were on a scale of 0-5 with 0 = Not Important and 5 = Very Important.

Small classes allow teachers to individually assess each student and conduct three parent/student/teacher conferences a year.

The Business/Education Alliance provides extra funding to help reduce class size.

"To study the effects of small class size in grades K-3, 79 schools participated in the Student/Teacher Achievement Ratio (STAR) Project from 1985 to 1989.

These schools assigned teachers and students at random into one of three types of classrooms: (1) small, one teacher for 13 to 17 students; (2) regular, one teacher for 22 to 25 students; and (3) regular-with-aide, one teacher for 22 to 25 students with a full-time teacher aide.

Project STAR involved over 6,000 students a year for four years. To measure the effect of the class sizes on student achievement, program evaluators considered scores from the Stanford Achievement Test and Tennessee's Basic Skills First test.

The results of these tests showed that the small classes consistently performed better across all grade levels than the regular class and the regular class with the full-time teacher aide. Among groups showing the greatest improvements were inner-city students and students of low socioeconomic status."

Nye, Barbara A. and others. "Smaller Classes Really Are Better." American School Board Journal. 179, 5 (May 1992): 31.

Small Class Size

Downtown School students receive instruction in art, music, and physical education from classroom teachers rather than specialists. The Downtown School reallocated resources normally going to specialists to help reduce class size.

No satisfactory solution has been found yet to restore the expert instruction from specialists in these areas and the individual planning time so necessary for teachers to provide a quality program. Recognizing the value of expert instruction, fine arts are regularly integrated by Downtown School classroom teachers. The school also hosts visiting artists in dance, visual arts, and music.

When asked what is good about our school, a parent responded, *"Individualized learning facilitated by small class size and outstanding educators."*

Small class size allows for more success for students with special education needs in the regular classroom setting.

"From 1978 to 1980, three controversial "meta-analyses" of class size research were published by Glass and Smith; these analyses have since come to dominate discussion of the issue. Smith and Glass employed sophisticated statistical methods to correlate the findings of 80 studies that yielded over 700 comparisons of smaller and larger classes with respect to student achievement, classroom processes, and teacher and student attitudes. Their conclusion is unequivocal: a positive correlation can be drawn between smaller classes and all these variables."

Ellis, Thomas I. Class Size. *Urbana, IL: ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education. ED-259454.*

Integrated Curriculum

Traditional subjects are integrated
and often focus on themes.

"The children seem to really get excited about the different themes! They not only learned about pillbugs, but did so many different things with them: pillbug races, building and setting pillbug traps, and trying to start a pillbug farm!...my daughter felt she should document what didn't work as well as what worked -- that's real learning.."
Downtown School parent

Students learn and practice subject-area skills
in authentic problem-solving situations.

Students demonstrate their competency through
developmentally appropriate projects and
presentations to peers and parents.

"The curriculum is integrated so that learning occurs primarily through projects, learning centers, and playful activities that reflect current interests of children. For example, a social studies project such as furnishing and caring for an aquarium, provides focused opportunities for children to plan, dictate, and/or write their plans (using invented and teacher-taught spelling), to draw and write about their activity, to discuss what they are doing, to read nonfiction books for needed information, to work cooperatively with other children, to learn facts in a meaningful context, and to enjoy learning. Skills are taught as needed to accomplish projects."

National Association for the Education of Young Children. Appropriate Education in the Primary Grades: A Position Statement. Washington, DC: NAEYC. 1989: 6.

"An integrated curriculum supports children's learning because it provides ample time for experimentation, speculation, and discussion in order for children to become deeply engaged in content. This way, over time, they see subtle relationships and make connections. In-depth thinking does not happen when children gather disconnected bits of knowledge or learn in compartmentalized packages."

Mitchell, Anne and Judy David, ed. "Integrated Curriculum for Four- through Eight-Year-Olds," Explorations with Young Children: A Curriculum Guide from the Bank Street College of Education. 1992, 146.

Multiage classes

Each class includes students whose ages span two or more years. This organization is often referred to as "multiage" or "nongraded."

Students accept differences as natural and recognize the strengths of individuals; not all students are expected to be at the same level. Students' self-concept and confidence are enhanced.

"In simplest terms, the nongraded schools model allows pupils to advance from one concept/skill level to the next as they are ready, regardless of age or grade...students in those programs may have improved chances of good mental health and positive school attitudes...the nongraded model is particularly beneficial for minorities, boys, underachievers, and low-income pupils."

Davis, Rodney. The Nongraded Primary: Making Schools Fit Children. Arlington, VA: American Association of School Administrators, 1992: 1.

Social and academic growth are accelerated as students are able to associate with peers at other developmental levels.

Students are encouraged to share knowledge with classmates. Students benefit because teaching others reinforces learning.

"...students in the non-graded program had significantly higher scores on report card measures of oral expression (listening/speaking skills), writing, mathematics problem solving, and citizenship than did students in traditional classrooms. Citizenship measures include independence, ability to work cooperatively, social skills, work completion, initiative, and ability to listen attentively."

Tanner, C. Kenneth and John D. Decotis. "The Effects of a Continuous-Progress, Non-Graded Program on Primary School Students." ERS Spectrum (Summer 1994): 43, 47.

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Multiage classes

"Multiage classes allow teachers to have children for more than one year, which makes a phenomenal difference interacting with the children. Teachers get to know each student as a person and learner and can more effectively provide for them through a stable, trusting relationship."
Kevin Fangman, Downtown School teacher

Downtown School teachers find multiage class structure requires more planning but clearly see the benefits to children as outlined in the research.

All Downtown School students, including five-year olds, are integrated in the multiage setting for the entire day.

District Improvement Plan Goal 5: By the opening of the 1999-2000 school year, 40 percent of district kindergarten students will be in full-day programs.

"Mixed-age grouping resembles family and neighborhood groupings, which throughout human history have informally provided much of children's socialization and education.

Research indicates that social development can be enhanced by experiences available in mixed-age grouping. Leadership and prosocial behaviors have been observed to increase.

Mixed-age groups enhance older children's responsibility.

Interaction between less able and more able children benefits all individuals both academically and socially.

Teachers change from being a transmitter of knowledge to a more active role of supporter, guide, and facilitator of children's learning."

Katz, Lilian G. and others. "The Case for Mixed-Age Grouping in Early Education." Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1991: v, 13.

Experience-Based, Active Learning

Students are self-directed, active learners exploring a variety of educational materials.

Downtown School students spend portions of their day working individually and in groups doing hands-on activities.

"Wow! Wow! Wow!
Teachers are actively involved.
Students are actively involved.
Children are independent learners.
The environment here is very welcoming and there is student ownership."
Visiting teacher, Lake City, Iowa

Classes often take field trips to learn firsthand from the people and resources in the unique downtown location.

"Teachers use much of their planning time to prepare the environment so children can learn through active involvement with each other, with adults and older children serving as informal tutors, and with materials. Many learning centers are available for children to choose from...Teachers encourage children to evaluate their own work and to determine where improvement is needed, and assist children in figuring out for themselves how to improve their work.

Individual or small groups are expected to work and play cooperatively or alone in learning centers and on projects they usually select themselves or are guided to by the teacher...Frequent outings and visits from resource people are planned. Peer tutoring as well as learning from others through conversation while at work or play occurs daily."

National Association for the Education of Young Children. Appropriate Education in the Primary Grades: A Position Statement. Washington, DC: NAEYC. 1989: 8.

Experience-Based, Active Learning

Because people learn more when they experience things for themselves and teach others, Downtown School teachers create an environment that encourages students to learn by doing and then share their learning with the class.

We learn
10%
of what we read
20%
of what we hear
50%
of what we see and hear
70%
of what we discuss
80%
of what we experience ourselves
95%
of what we teach to someone else.

William Glasser

Extended School Year

Downtown School students benefit from a longer school year, three weeks more than the traditional school calendar provides.

The Downtown School has a year-round calendar with a six-week summer break and four week-long breaks throughout the year.

With a shorter summer break, students retain more information, requiring less review time in the fall.

Students do not miss instructional time due to hot weather because the school is air-conditioned and not bound by the district transportation system; parents provide transportation for their children.

"Advantages of Year-Round Education

- Time spent reviewing is minimal because students do not forget material after only a few weeks of vacation
- There is less teacher and student burnout.
- Teachers, parents, and students can vacation at different times during the year besides the traditional June, July, and August.
- There is greater use of the facility as it never sits empty.
- Classes can go on summer field trips, such as a visit to the fair.
- Kids report they enjoy school more with frequent breaks.
- Recent research reports indicate academic achievement levels in math and reading show marked improvement, especially for lower ability students.
- Reduction in teacher and student absenteeism
- Lower rate of suspensions and other disciplinary action
- Greater continuity of appropriate intervention for students with special needs
- Opportunity to more effectively monitor student progress"

O'Connor, Jim and others. Year-Round Education: Calendar of the Future. presented at the 19th Annual All-Iowa Administrator Conference, August 10-11, 1994: 8.

Three-Way Conferences & Portfolio Assessment

Conferences at the Downtown School are three-way: parents, teachers, and students all participate.

"What a wonderful way for our son to show us what he has learned. It makes him so proud! Me too!"
Downtown School parent

Conferences are held three times each year. Students who are new to the school benefit from an additional conference before the school year begins.

Students participate in conferences to monitor and take responsibility for their own growth and learning.

"I liked making my daughter a part of the conference. Plus, I like the format of achievements and goals--seems a lot like what she will encounter in the real world! I have to say I have never been satisfied with traditional schools' conference schedule--10-20 minutes twice a year."
Downtown School parent

Three-Way Conferences & Portfolio Assessment

The teacher, parents, and students review accomplishments and develop goals for future learning.

Teachers work with students in maintaining portfolios of work to authentically assess progress and share during conferences.

"The following principles should guide assessment procedures for children ages 3 through 8:

- ...Assessment involves regular and periodic observation of the child in a wide variety of circumstances that are representative of the child's behavior in the program over time.
- Assessment relies primarily on procedures that reflect the ongoing life of the classroom and typical activities of the children...
- Assessment relies on demonstrated performance, during real, not contrived activities, for example, real reading and writing activities rather than only skills testing.
- Assessment utilizes an array of tools and a variety of processes including but not limited to collections of representative work by children, records of systematic observations by teachers, records of conversations and interviews with children, teachers' summaries of children's progress as individuals and groups.
- Assessment recognizes individual diversity of learners and allows for differences in styles and rates of learning...
- Assessment is a collaborative process involving children and teachers, teachers and parents, school and community.
- Assessment encourages children to participate in self-evaluation...
- Information about each child's growth, development, and learning is systematically collected and recorded at regular intervals. Information such as samples of children's work, descriptions of their performance, and anecdotal records is used for planning instruction and communicating with parents."

National Association for the Education of Young Children and National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education. "Guidelines for Appropriate Curriculum Content and Assessment in Programs Serving Children Ages 3 Through 8." Young Children. (March 1991): 32-33.

Three-Way Conferences & Portfolio Assessment

Rather than grades, teachers use narratives to describe the student's growth in academic and social skills.

This type of reporting, while more time-consuming than traditional grading, gives parents a clearer description of their child's performance.

Teachers report the time required for individual assessment, compiling the portfolios, developing student educational profiles, and conducting the conference to be an average of three hours per student.

Teachers spend an average of forty-eight hours preparing for and conducting conferences three times per year.

Individually assessing and preparing the student for the conference is done during the school day. Time for preparing the narrative comes from before and after school planning time, teachers' lunch time, and teachers' personal time.

"Develop alternative assessment instruments and procedures that can be used instead of standardized tests. These include oral tapes of children's stories or reading progress and portfolios of students' writing and artwork. Recognize that currently available standardized tests provide very limited measures of school and student success...Increase the use of systematic observation of teacher and student performance, and documentation of sources of evidence of children's progress for use in curriculum planning, evaluation, and reporting to parents. Increase the use of measures that assess children's strengths and deficits."

Bredekamp, S. Protecting Children from Inappropriate Practices. Urbana, IL: ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education. EDO-PS-90-9.

"I like to come to school. I'm real sad that I can't come to school on Saturdays and Sundays."
Rique', Age 5, Student

"I couldn't read when I came here. Now I can read and write. I'm writing a chapter book."
Adam, Age 7, Student

"I'm learning about planes. I'm doing a project about them. Then I'll do a presentation to tell people what I studied about and learned."
Ben, Age 5, Student

II

The Downtown School will provide a top-quality academic program to a diverse community of students.

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The Students

The Downtown School student body reflects the diversity of the Des Moines School District.

"Since the Downtown School is in the neighborhood where their parents work, all students feel equally welcome."
Downtown School parent

The Downtown School promotes respect and acceptance of all people.

	District 1993-94	Downtown 1993-94	Downtown 1994-95
African-American	14%	20%	22%
American Indian	1%	0%	0%
Asian	5%	5%	3%
Caucasian	76%	70%	72%
Hispanic	5%	5%	3%
Total of Minority Groups	25%	30%	28%
Low Income Families	39%	30%	32%
Single-Parent Families	N/A	38%	21%
Students whose parents work in the downtown area	N/A	87%	91%

Downtown School 1993-94

African-American	20%
American Indian	0%
Asian	5%
Caucasian	70%
Hispanic	5%

Average District School 1993-94

African-American	14%
American Indian	1%
Asian	5%
Caucasian	75%
Hispanic	5%

☑ District Improvement Plan Goal 11: By the 2000-01 school year, all of the district's attendance centers will be in compliance with the state nondiscrimination guidelines. Schools are not to exceed a minority enrollment percentage that is twenty percent above the district minority percentage.

The Students

Downtown School families experience the same stresses as other families. Job loss, child abuse, divorce, remarriage, attention deficit disorder, homelessness, parent incarceration, chemical dependency, sibling incarceration, non-custodial parent kidnapping threats, death of a parent, unemployment, siblings born with birth defects, mental illness, spousal abuse, and fetal alcohol syndrome have all impacted Downtown School families.

During the 1994-95 school year, Downtown School students had an average daily attendance rate of 96.7% as compared to the district elementary average of 95.5%.

☑ District Improvement Plan Goal 1: By the end of the 1998-1999 school year, all schools in the district will have an average daily attendance of 94 percent or greater.

While attendance is good, tardies are a concern. During a typical month, 6% of the students were late three or more times, and 15% were tardy one or two times for a total of 21% of the students tardy at least once.

Enrollment Projections

The Downtown School served forty-five students during its first year. Demand for enrollment was so great that the school space and staff were expanded to accommodate eighty students in the 1994-95 school year and ninety-six students in 1995-96. Still, over 150 children have been turned away.

The Downtown School has over 250 students on waiting lists for the next five years. Several parents put their child's name on the list soon after they learned they were expecting a baby.

A goal of the Downtown School is to expand. The Business/Education Alliance is seeking space and other resources to meet the enrollment demand.

☑ District Improvement Plan Goal 7: By September 1997, the Business/Education Alliance and the district will provide a nongraded elementary educational program for students age 5 through 11 at a downtown location(s).

Open Enrollment

While the Des Moines Public School district as a whole is seeing an increasing number of students choose to enroll in suburban districts, a comparatively large percentage of Downtown School students have chosen to enroll from suburban districts.

	Students open enrolling from suburban districts during 1994-95	
District	316.6	1.0%
Downtown School	10	10.4%

The Downtown School serves approximately 0.3% of all district students, yet it attracts 3.2% of students open enrolling to the district.

"Our daughter had already been approved for open enrollment, but when we found out she was accepted at the Downtown School, we decided not to open enroll her out of the district."
Downtown School parent

☑ District Improvement Plan Goal 10: The district will reduce the number of kindergarten students seeking to open enroll from the district by 50 percent over the next five years.

School Administration

The Downtown School's principal is the Executive Director of the Des Moines Public Schools' Department of Elementary and Early Childhood Programs. On-site administration is provided by the Director of the Business/Education Alliance. These administrators provide facilitative leadership and support for the staff.

Teachers are empowered to make decisions concerning curriculum, instruction, evaluation, purchases, and other issues concerning the school program.

The entire staff is considered a problem-solving team. The administration often consults staff, parents, and sometimes students when making decisions.

The administration values and encourages staff collaboration and professional development, and provides opportunities for teachers to assume leadership roles. Innovation and risk-taking based on educational research and sound judgment is applauded.

The school secretary has expanded job responsibilities with time allotted to interact with the public, provide security, record attendance, and take the lunch count, in addition to clerical duties.

Teaching Staff

Downtown School educators interviewed for their positions and are among the many outstanding teachers in Des Moines Public Schools.

"I was impressed with the dedication and enthusiasm of all the teachers."
Visiting Teacher, November 14, 1995

To build a well-rounded team, the interview committee sought experienced teachers with a variety of specialized skills, including:

- early childhood certification and expertise working with talented and gifted students
- special education certification; reading recovery training
- music, technology, and art specialization
- a willingness to continue learning

100% of parents rated a high quality teaching staff at the Downtown School as important or very important.*

* From a survey of parents administered in the spring of 1995. Responses were on a scale of 0-5 with 0 = Not Important and 5 = Very Important.

Teaching Staff

"Outstanding teachers are the most important factor in the school's success."
Jan Drees, Director, Business/Education Alliance

Downtown School teachers continuously modify their instructional strategies, often minute-by-minute, to meet the needs of each student.

"Because of the wonderful teachers and their new approach to learning, we believe that our children receive the best education and learning experiences possible."
Downtown School parents

Teachers at the Downtown School seek opportunities for acquiring additional expertise.

The Downtown School teachers participated in a week-long seminar, "Engaging Children's Minds: The Project Approach," with Lilian Katz as the result of a grant during the summer of 1995.

Two teachers are involved in Reading Recovery training. Teachers have also attended workshops in the areas of math, literacy, and technology.

Technology, literacy, and student assessment training are part of the Downtown School Improvement Plan.

Redefining Basic Skills

Students need a solid foundation in what are traditionally referred to as *the basics:* reading, writing, and mathematics. However, students need more than these basic skills to succeed in the changing world.

"My daughter goes to the Downtown School. She's 5, so I knew I would be fortunate enough to enjoy 3 years there. As the year has progressed, she has blossomed and grown more than I ever believed possible for a child her age. She reads everything she gets her hands on, she writes anytime she has a spare moment (she writes little stories down just in the ride to work or back home each day), and has developed incredible social and public speaking skills.

At the same time, she's retained the "child" part of her, because the Downtown School recognizes it's not all about academics. It's about creativity and playing and manners and respect for yourself and others. She's developed a social consciousness that continually amazes me. She can talk to you about Hitler and about the homeless, as well as Bert and Ernie."

Downtown School parent

Redefining Basic Skills

The Downtown School's curriculum includes Des Moines Public School objectives emphasizing critical thinking and social skills students need throughout their lives.

Valuable teamwork skills are acquired as students work with each other on daily classroom activities.

Strong peer relationships are developed that cross racial and economic lines. The children make friends from all over the city.

Leadership skills are built in a variety of ways at the Downtown School. In the first two years, every student successfully completed one or more research projects which included: selecting a topic; gathering information from books, site visits, and interviews; and planning, organizing, and presenting their information to peers and parents. This provides opportunities for acquiring knowledge and skills, public speaking, and working in teams.

Redefining Basic Skills

The United States Secretary of Labor established the Secretary's Commission on Acquiring Necessary Skills (SCANS) to research and identify skills that people need to be successful members of the workforce.

The Downtown School is incorporating these SCANS skills* into the curriculum to develop students who are competent in the following:

Basic Skills

Read, locate, understand, and interpret written information.
Communicate thoughts, ideas, information and messages in writing; create documents such as letters, directions, manuals, reports, and graphs.
Perform computations and solve quantitative problems selecting appropriate mathematical techniques.
Receive, attend to, interpret, and respond to verbal messages.
Organize ideas and communicate orally to individuals and groups.

Thinking Skills

Generate new ideas; define goals; generate alternatives; consider risks; evaluate, prioritize, and choose the best alternatives.
Organize, process and graph information; use efficient learning techniques to acquire new knowledge and skills.
Discover rules, principles, and relationships and apply the understandings in problem solving.

Personal Qualities

Exert a high level of effort; persevere in attaining goals; and demonstrate responsibility, self confidence, and a positive attitude.
Demonstrate understanding, friendliness, adaptability, empathy, and politeness.
Choose ethical courses of action; set personal goals; and exhibit self-control.

*adapted to fit elementary students

Resources

Identify, organize, plan, and allocate resources.
Select goal-relevant activities; rank and prioritize them; allocate time; prepare and follow schedules.
Understand the role of money; prepare and follow budgets to implement class projects; and keep records of monetary transactions.
Acquire and use materials and space efficiently.
Recognize skills of others and provide feedback to others appropriately.

Interpersonal

Participate as a member of a team contributing to the group effort.
Teach others new information and skills.
Work to satisfy others' expectations.
Exercise leadership.
Communicate ideas to justify position, persuade, and convince others.
Responsibly challenge existing procedures and policies.
Negotiate agreements involving exchange of resources.
Negotiate resolutions of divergent interests.
Work effectively with others from diverse backgrounds.
Demonstrate a positive attitude in working with others.

Information

Select, evaluate, use, organize, maintain, interpret, and communicate information.
Use technology to process information.

Systems

Understand complex systems.
Know how social, organizational, and technological systems work and operate effectively with them.
Monitor and correct performance; distinguish trends; predict impacts on system operations; diagnose deviations in systems' performance; and correct malfunctions.
Improve or design systems; suggest modifications to existing systems; and develop new or alternative systems to improve performance.

Technology

Select appropriate technology.
Use equipment properly; identify and solve problems with equipment, including computers and other technologies.

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Reading Assessment

In 1994, the district tested a random sample of first graders to determine reading text levels using Reading Recovery Running Record evaluations.

The Downtown School learners were evaluated and compared with District first graders.

The test evaluates a student's skill in reading text correctly and fluently but does not include comprehension.

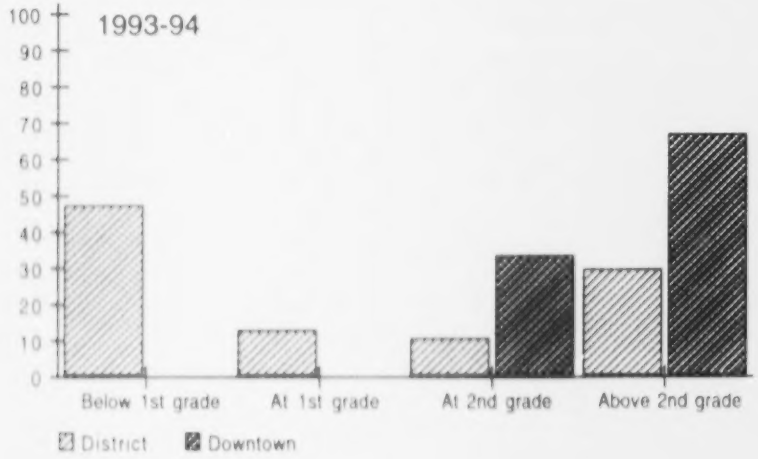
Reading Text Levels*

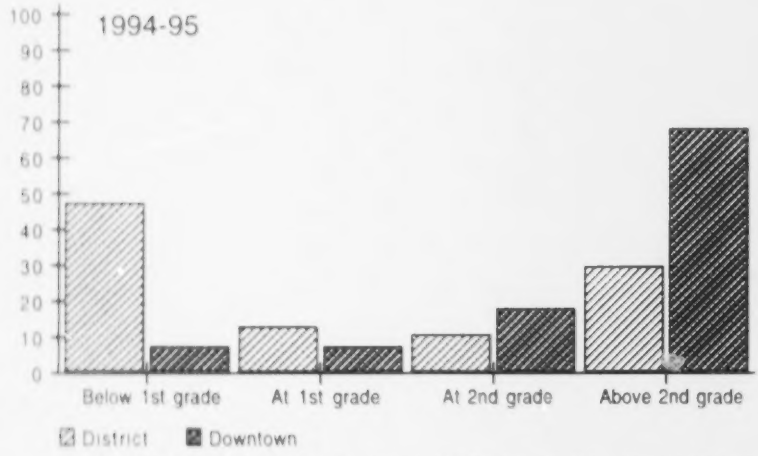
	Below 1st Grade Level	At 1st Grade Level	Above 1st Grade Level
District			
6 yr. olds 1993-94 (End of First grade)	48.0%	13.0%	39.0%
Downtown			
6 yr. olds 1994-95 (End of First grade)	**7.0%**	**10.7%**	**82.3%**
6 yr. olds 1993-94 (End of First grade)	**0.0%**	**0.0%**	**100.0%**
5 yr. olds 1994-95 (End of Kindergarten)	57.5%	7.7%	34.8%

*Using the Reading Recovery Running Record assessment

Although the number of students enrolled was small, the following graphs illustrate the percent of students scoring at each level.

Reading Text Levels - All Students



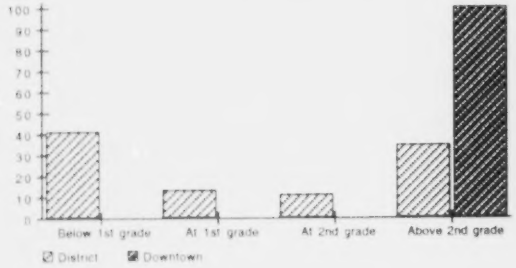


District 1993-94 n= 198; Downtown 1993-94 n= 6; Downtown 1994-95 n= 28.

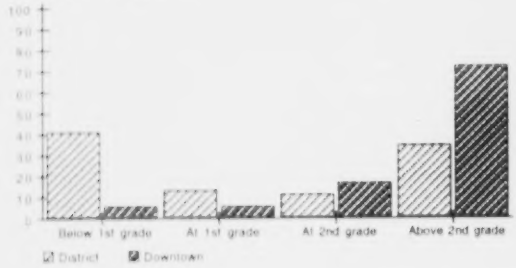
Reading Assessment

FEMALES

1993-94 results
District n= 90
Downtown n= 3

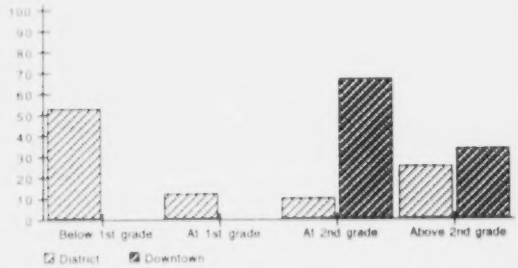


1994-95 results
District n= 90
Downtown n= 18

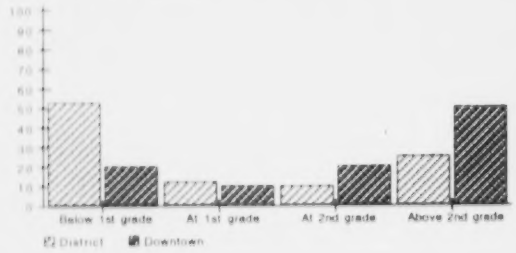


MALES

1993-94 results
District n= 108
Downtown n= 3

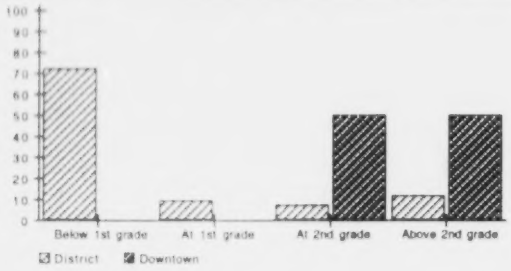


1994-95 results
District n= 108
Downtown n= 10

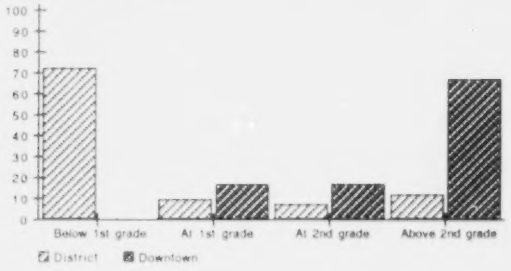


FREE/REDUCED-PRICE LUNCH

1993-94 results
District n= 43
Downtown n= 2

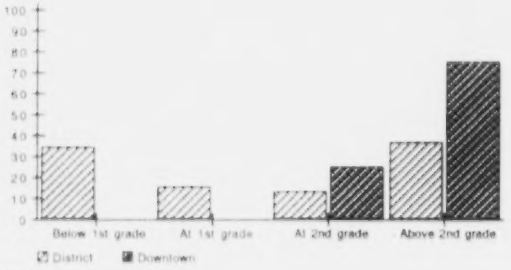


1994-95 results
District n= 43
Downtown n= 6

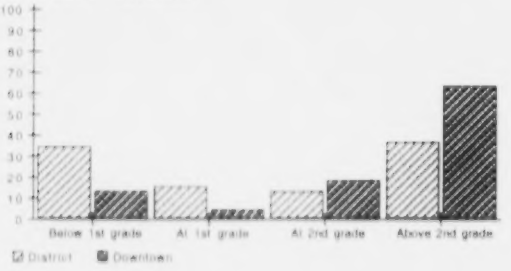


NON-FREE/REDUCED-PRICED LUNCH

1993-94 results
District n= 84
Downtown n= 4



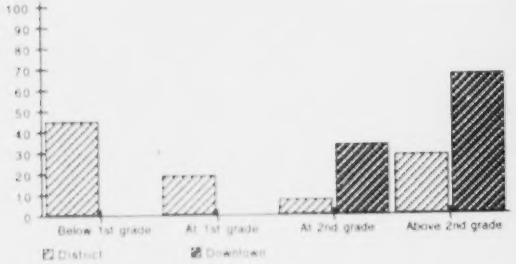
1994-95 results
District n= 84
Downtown n= 22



Reading Assessment

MINORITIES

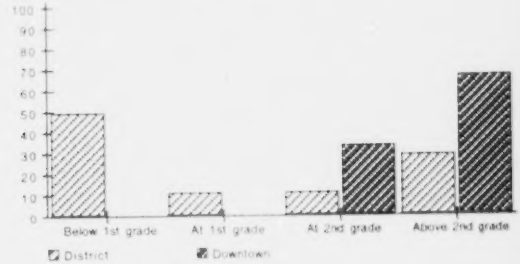
1993-94 results
District n=22
Downtown n=3



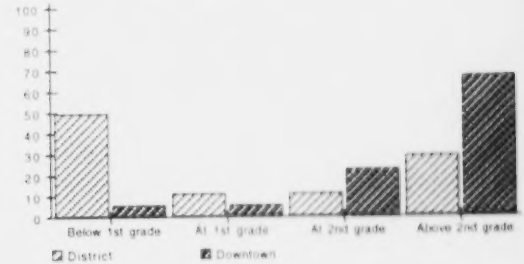
1994-95 results
District n=22
Downtown n=10

NON-MINORITIES

1993-94 results
District n=138
Downtown n=3



1994-95 results
District n=138
Downtown n=18



Reading Assessment

The following chart traces the two-year progress of students who entered the Downtown School as five-year-olds.

Reading Recovery Running Record Text Levels

	Below Grade Level	At Grade Level	One Year Above Grade Level	More than One Year Above Grade Level
Beginning of 1st year (kindergarten) 9/93	*	**88.5%**	7.7%	3.8%
End of 1st year (kindergarten) 6/94	*	3.8%	**61.5%**	34.6%
End of 2nd year (1st grade) 6/95	7.7%	7.7%	11.5%	**73.1%**

* The evaluation does not measure and identify students functioning below kindergarten level.

The first testing revealed that students were beginning school at the expected levels, only 10% of them above grade level. However, by the end of their second year at the Downtown School, 84% of the students were performing above grade level.

When students develop fluency, word recognition, and decoding skills, teachers begin assessing them with other measurements, including the Silver Burdett Ginn and Qualitative Reading Inventory assessments.

Reading Assessment

Since the Downtown School is a school of choice and five-year old students attend full-day sessions, the following table uses the same district random sample of first-graders, but compares Downtown School reading scores with students from similar situations.

The "schools of choice" are schools requiring parents to request open enrollment and obtain approval through district procedures. Each of these schools has a primary focus in one of three areas: traditional education, fine arts, or science.

The extended-day kindergarten figures reflect students who participated in all-day programs during their kindergarten year.

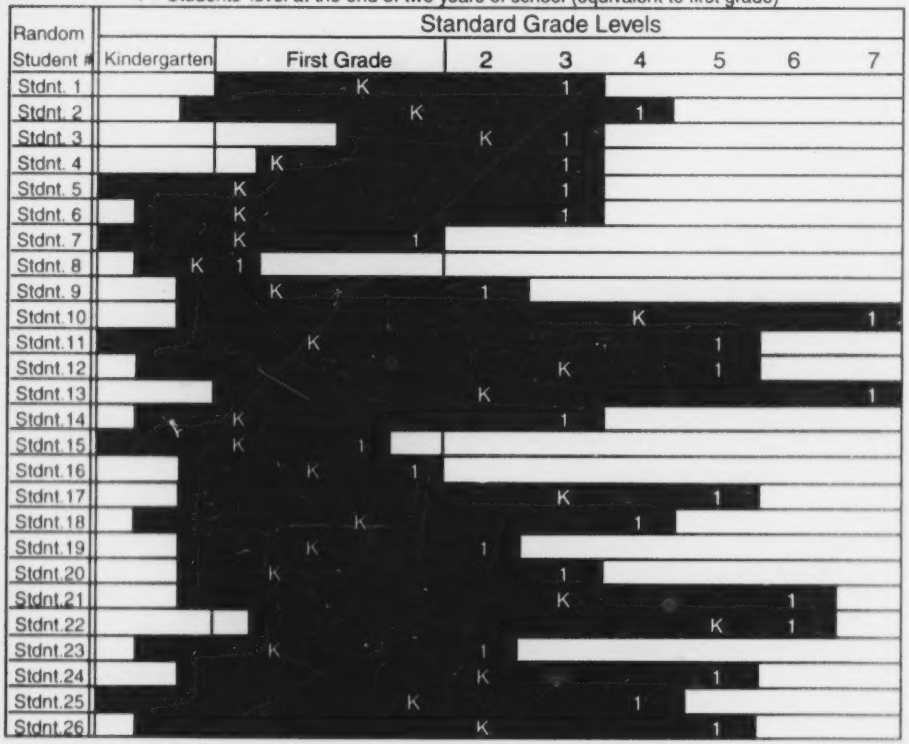
	Below 1st grade level	At 1st grade level	Above 1st grade level
Downtown School (n=34)	5.8%	8.8%	85.3%
Schools of Choice (n=24)	54.2%	12.5%	33.3%
Extended-Day Kindergarten Students (n= 131)	46.6%	9.9%	43.5%
Schools of Choice AND Extended-Day Kindergarten Students (n=12)	75.0%	8.3%	16.7%

Reading Assessment

The following chart illustrates the growth of individual students over two years. It shows the diverse reading levels among students of the same age.

Individual Student Progress on Reading Text Level Assessment

K = Students' level at the end of one year of school (equivalent to kindergarten)
1 = Students' level at the end of two years of school (equivalent to first grade)



The left edge of each teal bar indicates the student's level when entering the school. The right edge of the bar indicates the student's level at the end of the second year of school. For instance, student 11 entered school reading at the beginning kindergarten level. By the end of the second year, student 11 was assessed at 5th grade level.

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Composition Assessment

Downtown School eight-year-olds took the District Composition Assessment and compared favorably to the district students. Scores are categorized by the district as "developing," "competent," "proficient," and "exemplary." The district standard is for 80% of students to score "competent."

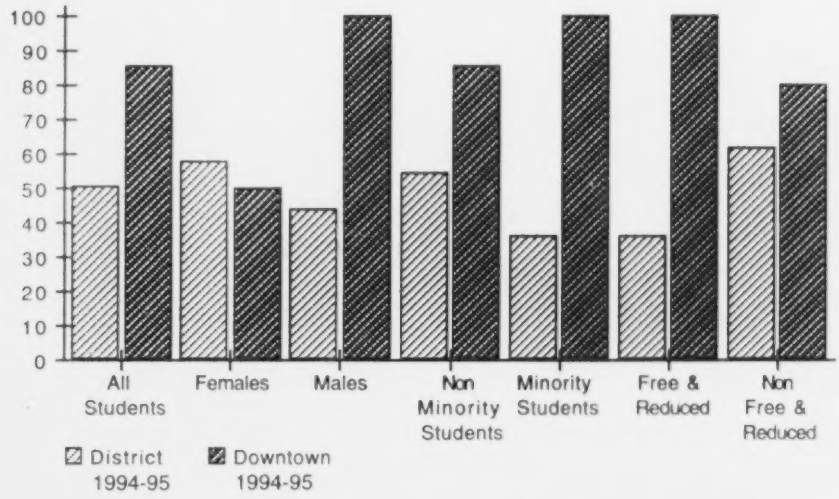
District Third Grade Composition Assessment Data
Percent of Students Achieving the "Competent" Standard or Higher*

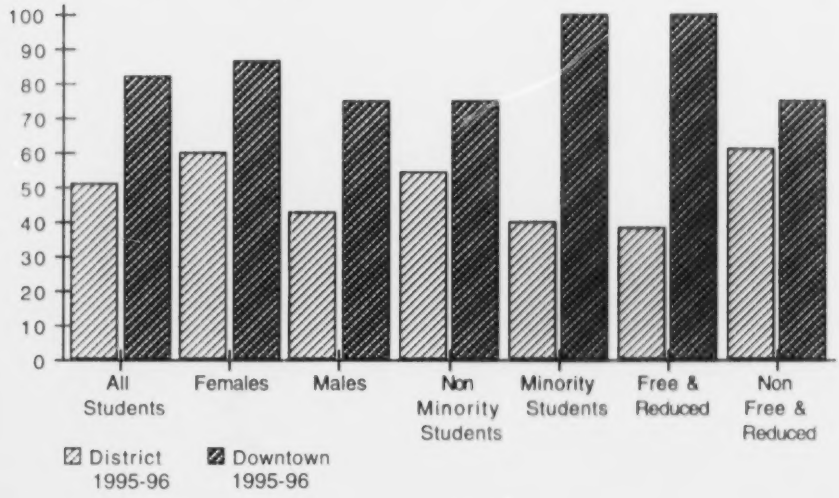
	All Students	Females	Males	Non Minority Students	Minority Students	Free & Reduced	Non Free & Reduced
District 1994-95	50.7	57.5	44.0	54.6	36.2	36.1	61.9
Downtown 1994-95	**85.7**	**50.0**	**100.0**	**85.7**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**80.0**
District 1995-96	51.3	59.8	42.7	54.6	39.9	38.1	60.9
Downtown 1995-96	**82.0**	**86.8**	**75.0**	**75.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**75.0**

*As defined in the October 1995 Des Moines Independent Community School District report on "Assessment Program Results 1994-1995." Based on a Holistic score maximum of 10 points and a score of 8 points for each dimension, Competent is a Holistic of 6 and a Dimensional Mean of 5 or greater. District n=2305, 1994-95 Downtown n=7, 1995-96 Downtown n=11.

Samples of students' daily written work are included in their portfolios. Written work includes recorded observations, reports, note cards, newsletter articles, journal entries, and other teacher-assigned and student-initiated writing.

Graphical Representation of District Composition Assessment Data
Percent of Students Achieving the "Competent" Standard or Higher*





Math Problem Solving Assessment

The district established the 70% mastery level as the goal for the objectives-based test measuring math problem-solving skills. Downtown School students all scored higher than this target.

District Objectives-Based Math Problem-Solving Test
Percent of students scoring 70% or higher, 1994-95

	2nd Grade			3rd Grade		
	District	Downtown	n	District	Downtown	n
All Students	70.8	100.0	6	73.7	100.0	8
Females	70.6	100.0	4	72.6	100.0	3
Males	71.0	100.0	2	74.7	100.0	5
Non-Minority	76.1	100.0	4	77.9	100.0	7
Minority	52.8	100.0	2	58.6	100.0	1
Free & Reduced	60.1	100.0	2	62.7	100.0	2
Non-Free & Reduced	80.5	100.0	4	82.8	100.0	5

District 2nd graders n=2319; District 3rd graders n=2284

	2nd Grade		3rd Grade	
	District	Downtown	District	Downtown
Mean Score of all students	**77.8%**	**90.8%**	**77.8%**	**85.0%**

☑ District Improvement Plan Goal 8: By the beginning of school year 1999-2000, 80 percent of elementary students will achieve at least 70 percent mastery on district criterion-referenced assessments of mathematics.

Math Problem Solving Assessment

Math instruction at the Downtown School reflects the way math is used every day: solving real problems. The district's new math curriculum closely supports this teaching.

Downtown School teachers also use a variety of other teaching resources to teach quantitative concepts.

Students use higher order thinking skills as they determine how to solve math problems. A math lesson may include deciding whether to work independently or with a team, choosing what materials to use (i.e., whiteboard or blocks), determining the appropriate problem-solving strategies, performing the necessary operations, and writing out answers. Students share processes used, supporting their answers by explaining their reasoning.

"We've found that writing supports children's learning by helping them sort out, clarify, and define their thinking. In addition, writing helps teachers assess what students understand."

Burns, Marilyn. "Introduction," Math and Literature (K-3). Math Solutions Publications, 1992.

GOALS Mathematics Assessment

Recognizing that new instructional methods necessitate new testing, the Downtown School explored authentic standardized assessment alternatives.

The GOALS Mathematics test is a performance-based, norm-referenced test designed by The Psychological Corporation, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc.

GOALS measures the broad range of skills a student uses in solving problems in mathematics. It not only measures the correctness of the final answer, but also assesses the step-by-step process a student uses.

GOALS assesses an integrated set of skills, rather than isolated equations or problems to solve individually. For instance, figuring the amount of paint needed to cover a room of given size involves skills in measurement, geometry, computation, estimation, and mathematical reasoning.*

* GOALS Guidelines, Number Two. The Psychological Corporation. 1992: 3.

GOALS offers tests for reading, mathematics, language, science, and social science. As of this date, only the mathematics test has been piloted.

GOALS Mathematics Assessment

The Downtown School students taking the GOALS assessment were seven years of age at the beginning of the 1994-95 school year, which is the equivalent of second grade level.

All Downtown School students ranked in the 96th percentile or higher when compared nationally. The chart below shows the percentile rank of the mean scores of students.

1994-95 GOALS 2nd Grade Mathematics Assessment
Downtown School Percentile Ranks derived from National Norms

	Downtown Percentile Rank
All Students	99
Males	98
Females	99
Minority	99
Non-Minority	99
Free/Reduced Lunch	99
Non-Free/Reduced Lunch	99

Downtown n=7

ITBS Pizza Math Assessment

The Iowa Test of Basic Skills Pizza Math Performance Assessment was another authentic standardized assessment piloted at the Downtown School.

The Performance Assessments for ITBS are a series of constructed-response assessments that give students opportunities to apply content-area concepts and higher-order thinking processes in real-life situations. The assessments permit both criterion-referenced and norm-referenced interpretations of achievement.*

The assessment tasks are designed to reveal students' strategic-thinking and problem-solving capabilities. It provides teachers with insight into what their students really know and can do and provides several scoring options including national percentile ranks.*

The mathematics assessments reflect the recommendations made by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics in its Curriculum and Evaluation Standards for School Mathematics.*

* *Performance Assessments for ITBS and Performance Assessments for TAP & ITED Grades 1-12 Technical Report.* Chicago: Riverside Publishing Company. 1996: 3-4.

ITBS Pizza Math Assessment

The assessment measures the students' mathematical reasoning capabilities, as well as their ability to communicate understanding through mathematical symbols and words of their own choosing. Assessment of computational skills is limited to the context of problem-solving.

The following chart illustrates the national percentile rank of Downtown School students. Individual student national percentile ranks ranged from 79 to 97.

1994-95 ITBS Pizza Math Results

	National Percentile Rank
All Students	94
Males	94
Females	92
Minority	90
Non-Minority	94
Free/Reduced Lunch	95
Non-Free/Reduced Lunch	93

Downtown n=7

III

The Downtown School will utilize the unique resources afforded by its location.

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A Part of the Downtown Community

The Downtown School staff and students were overwhelmingly welcomed by the downtown neighborhood.

"The school adds to the vibrancy of the city's core and provides a service to parents who work downtown."
Hal Thorne, Pioneer Hi-Bred International, Inc.

The resources of the main Des Moines Public Library are used, rather than establishing a separate library in the school.

Students use the downtown as an extended classroom. Their excursions have included visiting bank vaults, watching ice being made at Veterans Memorial Auditorium, displaying art in Convention Center windows, and participating in Court Avenue festivals.

A Part of the Downtown Community

Weekly, speakers from local businesses and other organizations have shared their expertise with Downtown School students.

Downtown Kiwanians volunteer to work with students, often helping them with reading and writing tasks.

Students benefit from many intergenerational activities with residents of Elsie Mason Manor. For example, on Valentine's Day, students share cards, treats, and conversation with their senior neighbors.

"I got stares at first when I walked two of my children through the skywalk to school. It's really different but the kids are really pumped. They think they're pretty cool getting to come with Mom to work."
Downtown School Parent

Using Downtown Resources

The following businesses and organizations extended their hospitality and became part of the learning environment of the Downtown School.

American Republic
American Security
Babe's Brewery
Banker's Trust Company
Boatmen's Bank
Boesen the Florist
Botanical Center
Brenton Bank
Burger King
Capital Square
Catholic Diocese
Central Campus
City Deli
Coney Island
Continental Travel Agency
Court Avenue Association
Des Moines City Hall
Department of Traffic & Safety
Des Moines Civic Center
Des Moines Community Center
Des Moines Convention Center
Des Moines Ink, Inc.
Des Moines Public Library
Des Moines Register
Des Moines River
Do-Biz Bakeries
Dotty's Donuts
Downtown Kiwanians
East High School
801 Grand Building
801 Grand Steak and Chop House
Elsie Mason Manor
Embassy Club
Embassy Suites
Employers Mutual
Equitable
Firestation #1
First Star
FX from New York
Greater Des Moines Chamber of Commerce Federation

Using Downtown Resources

Hawkeye Pantry
Hoyt Sherman
Iowa Historical Building
Java Joe's
Kaleidoscope
KCCI TV
Kinko's
KLYF Radio
Koch Brothers
Ligutti Tower
Locust Street Mall Food Court
Maid-Rite
Marriott Hotel
Marsden Maintenance
Marsha's
Metropolitan Club
The Metz
Michael J's
Metropolitan Transit Authority
Nolan Plaza
Norwest Bank
Park Place
Pioneer Hi-Bred International
The Plaza
Police Station
Principal Financial Group
Q-102 Radio
Raccoon River
Rocs
St. John's Lutheran Church
Savery Hotel
Scribbles and Giggles
Sec Taylor Stadium
Shoe Doctor
Spaghetti Works
State Historical Building
Stella's Blue Sky Diner
Subway
US Post Office
US West
Walgreens
Walnut Creek Wildlife Refuge
Younkers
YWCA

IV

The Downtown School will collaborate with businesses to create a model school for others to replicate.

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Partnership with Businesses

The Downtown School was developed jointly by the business community and the Des Moines Public Schools through the Business/Education Alliance. The City of Des Moines, nonprofit agencies, Des Moines PTA Council and other community members also collaborated on the development.

The business community and school district contribute resources for the school's operation. The business community provides space on the skywalk in the heart of the business district as well as financial resources for the smaller class size and longer school year. The school district provides teachers, curriculum, and resources for other operating expenses on the same basis as it does to other schools.

Des Moines Public Schools' Executive Director of Elementary and Early Childhood Programs allotted 0.1 of his time for administration of the Downtown School during its first two years. The Executive Director of the Business/Education Alliance also provides administration for the school.

1994-1995	Downtown School	District Elementary Schools
Adults to students	1 : 13	1 : 8.5
Associates to all certified	0 : 5.5	1 : 4.6
Clerical to all certified	.5 : 11	1 : 21.2
All certified to students	1 : 14.5	1 : 13.4
Associates to students	0 : 80	1 : 61.5
Classroom teachers to students	1 : 16	1 : 15.3

These faculty/student distribution comparisons were published in March of 1995.

The Downtown School has features that require additional or reallocated resources.

Longer School Year

- Provides more time for learning and parent communication
- Less review time required after summer break

	Annual Cost Per Student
Teachers' salaries for additional three weeks Paid by Business/Education Alliance	$ 169

Smaller Class Size

- Frequently assess students individually and use that assessment to guide instruction
- Manage an active, hands-on learning environment
- Keep anecdotal records on students to monitor learning and adjust instruction
- Help all students reach their potential in spite of increased numbers of children with emotional, behavioral, and academic needs
- Have more time to establish a cooperative relationship with parents
- Maintain a portfolio of student work
- Use a narrative reporting system
- Conduct more frequent and longer parent teacher conferences
- Write an individual educational plan and profile for each student

Reduce class size from 24 to 16		
Reallocated district resources	$ 616*	
Additional Alliance Resources		$ 332
Total Cost for Reduced Class Size	($ 616* + $ 332 = $948)	
Total Additional Dollars Per Student		**$501**

Space

Space is an in-kind donation from Principal Financial Group.

Transportation

Financial resources are not used for bus transportation to and from school. Parents provide transportation for their children.

* Reallocated from specialists for art, music, physical education, and counseling.
Calculations based on average teacher salary (35,018) plus benefits (10,505) which equals (45,523) for the 1995-96 contract year. A more detailed analysis of Business/Education Alliance and school district expenses are on file in the Business/Education Alliance office.

Model School

Educators from districts in Iowa, across the United States, and several foreign countries have visited the Downtown School and taken what they have observed back to their own schools.

"Thank you for sharing with our staff. Your ideas and enthusiasm are a joy to see. Only through innovators like you will the rest of us begin to change."
Visiting Elementary Principal

After visiting, some schools have invited Downtown School teachers to present in-service sessions in their schools.

"We appreciated the opportunity to simply witness the school in operation. Even without the ability to communicate verbally, because we did not share a common language, we did understand the philosophy and design of the school by actually seeing the classes, children, and equipment."
Visiting Educator from Kyrgyzstan

Visitors: 2,038

During the first two years, over 2,000 educators, school board members, business people, and community members visited the Downtown School.

Visitors From Around the World
Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Kyrgyzstan, Mexico, Russia, Sweden, Wales

Visitors From Around the Country
California, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, New York, North Carolina, South Dakota, Texas, Tennessee, Washington D.C.

Visitors From Across Iowa
Representatives from 69 school districts, 25 school boards, universities, and other educational institutions, and every elementary school in the Des Moines Public School district have visited.

Visiting Classroom

Drake University scheduled a graduate level education class at the Downtown School so students could observe a developmentally appropriate learning environment.

High school students from the Central Campus child care program come to the Downtown School during the noon hour to gain practical experience with students.

The Downtown School is a meeting place for district third graders touring the downtown during their Des Moines History and Architectural Heritage unit.

Granger Elementary School uses the Downtown School during their study of downtown businesses.

The Des Moines Public Schools Talented and Gifted department has used the visiting classroom for career seminars for eighth grade students.

Awards, Presentations, and Recognition

The Downtown School has been featured in many publications, both local and national.

Publication	Date
Des Moines Business Record	December 11, 1995
Des Moines Register	November 16, 1995
Management Review	September 1995
Des Moines Business Record	July 17, 1995
Des Moines Register	July 11, 1995
Des Moines Business Record	July 10, 1995
Des Moines Register	June 13, 1995
Des Moines Register	June 12, 1995
Update - Drake University Alumni News	December 19, 1994
School Board News	November 8, 1994
Working Mother Magazine	September 1994
Cedar Rapids Gazette	September 11, 1994
The Des Moines Register	September 9, 1994
USA Today 1994 Resource Guide	September 1994
Iowa Architect	Summer 1994
Des Moines Register	June 26, 1994
Des Moines Register	May 17, 1994
The Christian Science Monitor	January 1994
Indianapolis Star	December 19, 1993
Los Angeles Times	December 13, 1993
Washington D.C. Newsletter	November 1993
Governing Magazine	November 1993
National Report on Work and Family	November 1993
Iowa Commerce Magazine	October 1993
The Wall Street Journal	October 13, 1993
The Des Moines Register	August 24, 1993
Des Moines Register	August 20, 1993
Cityview	August 11, 1993
The Kiplinger Washington Letter	June 11, 1993
INK, Downtown Des Moines, Inc.	Summer 1993
Des Moines Register	June 4, 1993
Des Moines Register	May 27, 1993
Des Moines Business Record	May 24, 1993
Des Moines Register	May 19, 1993
Des Moines Register	April 17, 1993

Awards, Presentations, and Recognition

In 1994, the Downtown School was honored with the Community Solutions for Education award sponsored by the Coalition on Educational Initiatives and USA Today. This national award is given to recognize "grass-roots programs which improve learning opportunities for young people through comprehensive community involvement."*

Downtown School teachers delivered presentations at the 1995 convention of the National Association for the Education of Young Children in Washington D.C. as well as to several other organizations.

Downtown School teachers delivered in-service presentations to educators across the state via the Iowa Communications Network.

The Downtown School gained national television exposure when it was featured on FX's "Breakfast Time."

KCCI's Project Mainstreet awarded $1,000 to the school to begin its efforts toward the development of the Children's Garden.

The city-wide Parent-Teacher Association recognized the Business/Education Alliance as a community partner.

* Community Solutions for Education 1994 Resource Guide, p. ii.

V

The Downtown School will continuously conduct self-assessment and improvement activities.

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School Improvement

The Downtown School is constantly assessing needs and making adjustments for continuous improvement.

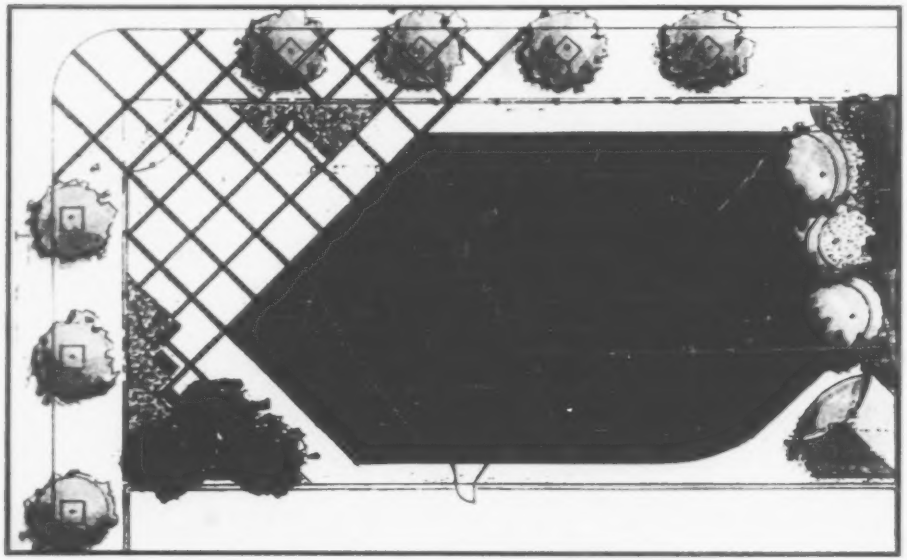
The Downtown School takes the time and makes the effort to identify and respond to the needs of its customers: parents and students.

During the school's first year, many students and parents identified problems with the hot lunches at school. A committee of parents, teachers, students, and Food Service administrators examined these concerns and made necessary changes. As a result of this committee's work, food is now delivered in hot carts, silverware is used instead of plasticware, and fresh fruits are served more often.

During the first two years of operation, physical activities were limited to the indoor facilities of the Des Moines Convention Center and outdoor facilities of downtown plazas. Parents, students, and staff recognized the need for a playground.

The Des Moines Public Schools, parents, the City of Des Moines, Knapp Properties, landscape architect Lori Pitts-Winegarden, McAninch Construction, and many private contributors are cooperating to create the Children's Garden at Fifth and Locust. This will be a playground and outdoor classroom for students, a garden for Elsie Mason Manor residents, and a recreational resource for the entire downtown community.

The Children's Garden
at the corner of Fifth and Locust



School Improvement

Each Des Moines Public School has an Improvement Plan which identifies future needs. The Downtown School Based Council focused on the following three areas for improvement: international standards, school expansion, and technology use.

The Downtown School is exploring international literacy standards to ensure that students receive an academic preparation of the highest quality.

The Downtown School is seeking space and resources to accommodate the increasing demand for enrollment.

The Downtown School has developed and begun to implement a plan for using technology to enhance teaching, learning, management, and communication at the school. Training for teachers is built into this plan.

Currently the Downtown School is establishing a presence on the Internet's worldwide web. This allows people from all over the country and the world to visit the school from their own classrooms, offices, and homes through this web site.

This is the home page of the web site at:
http://members.aol.com/DwntwnSchl/DowntownHome.html

Netscape: The Downtown School Home Page
The Downtown School
Classroom Updates
Weekly Newsletter
1995-96 School Calendar
School Based Council
Parent Teacher Association
1995 Community Report
Business Partners
Contact Us
Welcome to the Downtown School in Des Moines, Iowa!
The Downtown School is a project of the Business/Education Alliance.
Our school is a nongraded elementary based on research and the best practices in early childhood education.
You are visitor # 000000 16 to this page.
Copyright 1996 Des Moines Business/Education Alliance
Please send comments about this page to KLacey4@aol.com
The Downtown School
Document: Done.

Areas for Further Study

The Downtown School has identified several areas for further study.

Special education delivery systems are being reviewed nationwide. The Downtown School needs to develop ways to identify and serve students with special education needs consistent with the school's commitment to implement research and best practices.

Downtown School teachers have observed that the open space setting has more visual and auditory distractions for students than closed classrooms; however, it allows for more flexibility. Preliminary research appears to favor a modified open space environment to preserve flexibility, yet limit distractions. Further research is needed to study the impact of open space on student functioning.

"One argument in favor of open area schools is related to their economy and flexibility. Not all students, however, can handle the many distractions of an open space school and this is an area of frequent parental complaint...the type of classroom design made no significant difference in the students' attitude or achievement....It was found, however that the noise level and the level of visual distraction was much greater in the open space class than in the closed classroom...Teachers in favor of open concept stated reasons such as flexibility of grouping, team teaching, teacher relationships, and improved discipline as positive factors. Teachers who disapproved stated negative factors as being the noise level, limitations on teaching strategies, and emphasis on control of student behavior at all times."

Javor, Constance M. "Effects of Classroom Design on Student Achievement." ERIC Digest. Urbana, IL: ERIC Clearing house on Elementary and Early Childhood Education, ED278111.

Areas for Further Study

Three-way conferences and portfolio assessment require a significant amount of time. Parents and teachers view them as highly effective for both evaluation and communication. Study is needed to determine the appropriate amount of time to designate for assessment and conferences.

Time is a resource. Research needs to be consulted to find appropriate time allocation ratios for the following:

- conducting individual and group assessment
- planning instruction
- collaborating among staff
- communicating with parents
- preparing the classroom
- keeping thorough records
- participating in staff development opportunities
- reviewing, rethinking, and reflecting upon instruction
- delivering instruction
- reviewing and evaluating student work

Experiential, hands-on learning requires more space, planning, organization, and management than traditional classroom methods. When a commitment is made to an instructional strategy, resources need to be aligned to enable teachers to effectively implement the strategy.

Areas for Further Study

While students benefit from small class size and the extended school year, these features require additional resources. Further study is needed to determine how all resources should be allocated to provide those features most important to learning. For example, teachers place a higher priority on small class size when compared with the extended school year, believing more can be accomplished with a smaller group of students in a shorter period of time than with a larger group of students in a longer period of time.

Downtown School educators have assumed the responsibility for teaching art, music, and physical education to reduce class size by redirecting the resources normally allocated for these specialists. While realizing the benefit of small class size, there are disadvantages:

- teaching these additional subjects increases the amount of preparation needed
- the unique expertise of specialized instructors is lost
- teachers lose the planning time normally available during art, music, and physical education sessions

Satisfactory alternatives need to be researched.

Areas for Further Study

Parental involvement encompasses many things. These include:

- parents having a voice in school policy
- teachers and parents having frequent and open communication
- educators being accessible to parents
- parents practicing effective parenting
- parents being and perceiving they are welcome at school
- schools keeping parents informed about school's policies and curriculum
- parents reading to children at home
- parents getting their children to school on time
- parents getting their children to school every day ready to learn
- parents nurturing their children, giving them time and attention
- parents placing a high value on education and communicating this to their children

Further study is needed to explore the complexities of parental involvement and implement effective practices.

The above perceptions of parental involvement can be sorted into five distinct categories identified by Joyce Epsten at Johns Hopkins University's Center on Families, Communities, Schools, and Children's Learning:

The Five Types of Parental Involvement

I	Parenting
II	Communicating
III	Volunteering
IV	Learning at Home
V	Representing Other Parents

Areas for Further Study

The Downtown School presents several unique challenges to its teachers:

- *a high-profile position* - Visitors observe classes several times a month and the media is constantly seeking information about the school.
- *high expectations for parental input and participation* - The school's commitment to parental involvement requires increased time and effort from the teacher and a classroom always open to parents.
- *a revised calendar* - Pioneering the year-round calendar presents new challenges to teachers. For instance, many teachers use the summer break to pursue postgraduate education; the revised calendar does not coincide with the summer sessions of universities.
- *extra subjects to teach* - Reallocating district resources to allow small class size, classroom teachers instruct students in art, music, and physical education. This requires more preparation time, yet teachers lose planning time that would be available if specialist taught these subjects.

As it expands, the Downtown School must discover ways to attract and retain top-quality teachers.

Areas for Further Study

Group dynamics impact learning. The learning environment for the entire group is affected by all learners and can be negatively impacted by students who are chronically disruptive. Study is required to find effective ways to structure student groups.

Recognizing that teachers should teach what they test and test what they teach, the Downtown School needs to find ways to assess the acquisition of basic skills as they have been redefined on pages 48-49.

The Downtown School was developed using the most current research available at the time. As the educational research base grows the school needs to develop a plan to access, review, and implement improved practices based on current research.

"The Downtown School is a smashing success...delivering on its promise of a better and different learning environment for early school age children."

Lori Pitts Winegarden, parent

Acknowledgments

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